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(54) Three-dimensional scanning confocal laser microscope

(57) A confocal microscope for generating an image of a sample includes a first scanning element (44) for scanning a light beam along a first axis (15), and a second scanning element (56) for scanning the light beam at a predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to the first axis (15). A third scanning element (18) scans the light beam at a predetermined amplitude along a third axis (15) perpendicular to an

imaging plane defined by the first and second axes. The second and third scanning element are synchronized to scan at the same frequency. The second and third predetermined amplitudes are percentages of their maximum amplitudes. A selector determines the second and third predetermined amplitudes such that the sum of the percentages is equal to one-hundred percent.

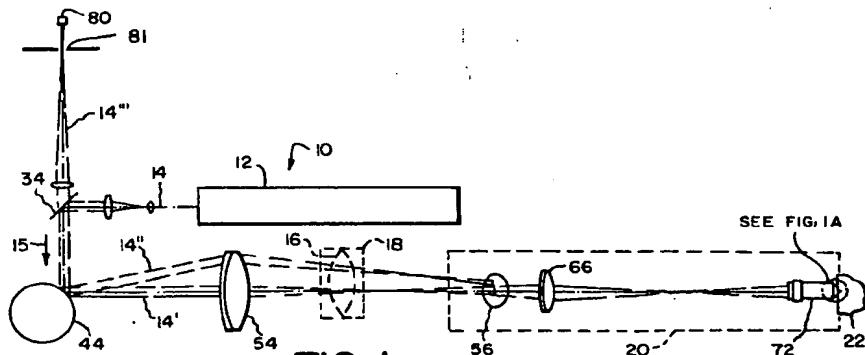


FIG. 1

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Description

This application is a continuation-in-part of co-pending application Serial No 08/372,479, filed January 13, 1995.

Studies relating to this invention were funded, in part, by DOE grant # DE-FG02-91ER61229. The United States government has certain rights in the invention.

Background

The invention relates to confocal microscopes.

Confocal microscopy involves focusing and scanning light at a sample plane in order to form a high-resolution, highly magnified image. Conventional confocal microscopes image samples by generating a series of thin "optical sections" which are high-resolution images of thin planes within the sample (see, e.g., U.S. Patents 4,827,125; 4,198,571, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference) Confocal microscopy usually is done *in vitro*.

There are two conventional types of confocal scanning microscopes. The tandem scanning confocal microscope ("TSCM") employs a rotating pinhole disk illuminated by a light source such as a mercury lamp. During operation, the disk sweeps a focal spot through a sample, and is additionally used to spatially filter back-scattered light. This instrument has been used, for example, to image sections of skin. A similar device, the confocal laser scanning microscope ("CLSM"), uses a laser beam to image a sample, such as a biopsied tissue sample. In this instrument, the laser beam is focused to a nearly diffraction-limited spot within a single plane of the sample. The spot is then scanned across the plane, or alternatively, the sample is translated using a micrometer stage. In general, the CLSM has greater detection power, superior wavelength selectivity, and better illumination power than the TSCM.

Summary

The invention features a confocal microscope including an image plane rotation assembly. The image plane rotation assembly includes three scanning elements for scanning a light beam along three orthogonal axes. Two of the scanning elements are synchronized to scan at a selected frequency. A selector is used to set the desired amplitudes of the scanned light beams of the two synchronized scanning elements; the desired amplitudes are a percentage of their maximum amplitudes and the sum of the percentages is equal to one-hundred percent.

Preferred embodiments include the selector being a controller with a frequency source for selectively varying the amplitudes of the two synchronized scanning elements. The two synchronized scanning elements are driven by a common frequency source.

The confocal microscope includes a pivoting articu-

lated arm housing a scanning element at a pivot point of the arm, an imaging lens, and a focussing lens positioned between the second scanning element and the imaging lens. The focussing lens is configured to make an entrance aperture of the imaging lens an optical conjugate to the scanning element in the arm so that spatial displacements of the field are minimized at the aperture. An aiming device aims the light beam as the light beam exits the scanning element and is configured to position the scanning element such that the light beam remains substantially centered on the entrance aperture of the imaging lens.

A light source emitting light at a wavelength between about 1550 and 1800 nm produces the light beam.

According to another aspect of the invention, a coupler for coupling a microscope objective lens to living tissue includes a template defining a tissue contacting surface for adhesive mounting to the tissue. The contacting surface defines a tissue imaging aperture. A housing defines a chamber for receiving the objective lens and includes a first mount for rigidly coupling the objective lens to the housing and a second mount for rigidly coupling the template to the housing.

According to another aspect of the invention, a method for generating an image of a sample includes illuminating the sample with a confocal microscope including an objective lens for focusing a light beam at the sample, and locating an index matching fluid having an index between about 1.39 and 1.41 between the objective lens and the sample.

The inventions have many advantages. The operator can non-invasively view optical sections of living tissue which are oriented along horizontal, vertical, or variably-angled planes. Images can be taken from well below the surface of the tissue. The microscope's articulated arm allows convenient positioning and contact with tissue. The articulated arm is configured to require fewer optical surfaces than in conventional systems, thereby minimizing light attenuation. The imaging lens contained by the arm can be placed in direct contact with the tissue, thereby minimizing relative motion between the lens and the tissue, and stabilizing the depth of the plane to be imaged.

Other features and advantages of the invention will be evident from the following detailed description and from the claims.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic representation of a confocal microscope according to the invention;
 Fig. 1A is an enlarged view of a tissue engaging imaging lens of the confocal microscope of Fig. 1;
 Fig. 2 is a side-sectional view illustrating xy sections taken at intervals along the z axis;
 Fig. 2A is a side-sectional view illustrating xz sections taken at intervals along the y axis;

Fig. 2B is a side-sectional view illustrating xw sections taken at intervals perpendicular to the w axis where w is an axis at an angle to the y axis, in the yz plane;

Fig. 3 is a schematic of a circuit for adjusting the relative scanning amplitudes along the y and z axes; Fig. 4 is a scan of a tilted plane;

Fig. 5 is a diagrammatic representation of an articulated arm of the confocal microscope shown in two positions; and

Fig. 6 is a diagrammatic representation of an imaging lens coupler, according to the invention;

Fig. 7 is a diagrammatic representation of a mounting plate for use with the imaging lens coupler of Fig. 6;

Fig. 8 is a plot of the absorption spectrum of water.

Detailed Description

Referring to Figs. 1 and 1A, a confocal microscope 10, according to the invention, includes a laser 12 producing an imaging field 14 along an optical path 15 (the z axis). Imaging field 14 is delivered to a tissue 22, e.g., human skin, to be imaged via an articulated arm 20.

Imaging field 14 from laser 12 is propagated through a partially transmitting beam-splitting optic 34 onto a reflecting surface of a fast scan device 44, e.g., a rotating polygon mirror defining about 25 reflecting facets driven at about 37,762 r.p.m. (this frequency corresponds to 15.7 kHz, the standard video rate).

As fast scanner 44 rotates, imaging field 14 is scanned in an oscillatory fashion along on axis (the x axis) perpendicular to optical path 15 (the z axis). Imaging field 14 is then directed through a transfer lens 54 into articulated arm 20. Two representative fields 14', 14" angularly displaced by fast scanner 44 are shown in the figures.

Articulated arm 20 houses a slow scanner 56, e.g., a galvanometric mirror oscillating at a frequency of 60Hz. Oscillation of slow scanner 56 scans the imaging field along a third axis (the y axis) perpendicular to the x and z axes. The scanned imaging field then passes through a focusing lens 66 onto a microscope objective lens 72. The depth of focus can be adjusted with lens 72 or, alternatively, by a focusing lens 16 (having, for example, a focal length of between 100 cm and 2 m) mounted on a scanning platform 18 which is translated along the beam path in an oscillatory manner in order to scan the depth of focus along optical pathway 15 (the z axis). In Fig. 1A, the two representative fields 14', 14" are shown focused within tissue 22 at discrete cites of constant depth.

Imaging is preferably performed using light remitted (i.e., reflected or emitted light) from tissue 22. A small portion 14" of the imaging field 14 is reflected off of the tissue following irradiation. Remitted light passes through a pinhole 81 to an optical detector 80. The portion of the reflected field scanned along the x axis gen-

erates electrical signals synchronized to the standard video frequency of 15.7 kHz, and the portion of the reflected field scanned along the y axis and/or the z axis generates electrical signals synchronized to a lower frequency of about 60 Hz, a rate corresponding to the frame-renewal frequency of conventional U.S. video equipment.

Referring to Figs. 2-2B, the scanning optics of the microscope can be manipulated to allow imaging of a series of horizontal (xy) sections 100 (Fig. 3), a series of vertical (xz) sections 110 (Fig. 3A), and a series of tilted (xw) sections 120 (Fig. 3B).

Different sections are imaged by changing the scanning magnitude (i.e., the magnitude of the scanning angle or longitudinal displacement) of one or more of the scanning optics 44, 56, 16. In the depth-dependent horizontal sections 100, the x and y axes are scanned, while the z axis is translated incrementally. For imaging of vertical sections 110, the x and z axes are scanned, while the y axis is translated incrementally.

Tilted sections 120 are imaged by scanning all three axes, and adjusting the relative scanning amplitudes of the y and z axes. Referring to Fig. 4, the adjustments can be made using a balance control, such as a simple potentiometer circuit, which allows the relative amplitudes of the waveforms sent by a common waveform driver 58 to scanning platform 18 and slow scanner 56 to be varied. The scan frequencies of scanning platform 18 and slow scanner 56 are synchronized by driver 58 in a frequency range between about 1 and 100 Hz.

Circuit 105 allows scanning of the xy plane, the xz plane, or any plane that includes the x axis. The slow-scan drive voltage V is apportioned to drive amplifiers 202, 204 (z and y axes scanning) by a single potentiometer R through operational amplifiers 202a, 204a, respectively. For example, when the knob is all the way clockwise, then the fraction f is equal to zero, and the full voltage appears across drive amplifier 202, resulting in an xz scan (the voltage across drive amplifier 204 is then zero). When the knob is fully counter-clockwise, f is equal to one, and the full voltage appears across drive amplifier 204, resulting in an xy scan. In between, for example, setting f equal to 0.3, drive amplifier 204 is at 0.3 times (30% of) its maximum output and drive amplifier 202 is at 0.7 times (70% of) its maximum output, resulting in the scan of a plane 201 at 23 degrees to the z axis ($\tan 23 = .3/.7$) (see Fig. 4).

Referring to Fig. 5, slow scanner 56 is positioned at pivot point 56a of arm 20 located at the conjugate image plane corresponding to the object plane of the fast scanner 44. This positioning minimizes movement of imaging field 14 on the surface of a reflecting "elbow" joint 68. During operation, slow scanner 56 undergoes two types of angular motion: rapid, oscillatory angular motion (at the frequency, e.g., of 60 Hz) scans the imaging field along the y axis for imaging purposes; while slow, non-oscillatory motion centers the imaging field on entrance aperture 72' of objective lens 72 during move-

ment of arm 20 (arrow 65). Slow scanner 56 is aimed on entrance aperture 72' by using a feedback sensor 56b, e.g., an encoder, which senses the movement of arm 20 and then slow scanner 56 is moved by half the angle of rotation of arm 20 about pivot point 56a. The slow motion can be accomplished with a mechanical gearing apparatus, although electrically induced motion, such as galvanometric motion, may also be used.

Because the arm is mobile and can thus follow the movements of the subject, small time-dependent fluctuations in the tissue, such as those corresponding to the subject's breathing or heart beat, can be corrected when the arm is secured to the subject.

Further stabilization of living skin can be achieved by more rigid microscope-to-skin coupling, e.g., by using an adhesive or suction to rigidly fix the skin to the articulated arm of the confocal microscope. Referring to Fig. 6, microscope-to-skin coupler 300 includes a brass ring 302 and template 304. Template 304 is glued onto the skin of the subject with a hole 306 in template 304 aligned with the skin site to be imaged. A microscope objective housing 308 defines a chamber 310 which receives objective 72. Housing 308 includes observation windows 312 and mounting arms 314 defining bolt receiving holes 316.

In use, template 314 is glued onto the subject's skin and housing 308 including objective 72 positioned within chamber 310 is placed within ring 302. Housing 308 and ring 302 are then attached using a screw 318.

Referring to Fig. 7, a mounting plate 320 includes a frame 322 defining a threaded hole 324 for engagement with a threaded portion 72a of objective 72. Arms 326 define slots 328 for attachment screws 330. Housing 308 is placed between arms 326 and screws 330 engage mounting holes 316 of arms 314. Slots 328 and slots 332 of arms 334 permit adjustment of the position of housing 308. Mounting plate 320 may be mounted to a three-dimensional stage (not shown) via face plate 336.

Referring to Fig. 8, the optical wavelength of laser 12 is chosen to optimize the image quality for a particular sample. Imaging of tissue 22 is dependent upon the refractive index difference between neighboring structures in the tissue and not absorption by stains or phosphorescent dyes. This permits the wavelength of incident light to be selected for maximum penetration into the tissue.

Wavelengths in the infrared are desirable because the light is less scattered, but water in the tissue is highly absorbent. Wavelengths in the infrared between the major water absorption bands, e.g., at 1064 nm and 1650 nm, are therefore preferred. In general, preferred wavelengths for imaging are between 700 and 2000 nm; shorter, visible wavelengths are strongly absorbed or optically scattered by most tissue, while selected bands and wavelengths deeper in the infrared (i.e., 1940 nm and wavelengths greater than about 3 microns) are more strongly absorbed by water present in most tissue.

5 Melanin, an epidermal absorber of light in the 600nm to near-infrared region of the spectrum, strongly backscatters light and thus can be used with the confocal microscope of the invention as a naturally-occurring contrasting agent.

10 Refractive index matching of about 1.40 between objective lens 72 and tissue 22 enhances image quality. Forty percent sucrose in water as the matching fluid provides the desired index matching.

15 The confocal microscope may be used to generate, non-invasive, real-time, video-rate images of living tissue. Tissue can be imaged *in vivo* and at depths in the range of about 0 to 3 mm in the skin; no tissue biopsy or other invasive technique is required for obtaining a specimen for microscopy.

20 Other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims.

25 It should be noted that the objects and advantages of the invention may be attained by means of any compatible combination(s) particularly pointed out in the items of the following summary of the invention and the appended claims.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

25 1. A confocal microscope including an image plane rotation assembly, said image plane rotation assembly comprising:

30 a first scanning element for scanning a light beam at a first predetermined amplitude along a first axis,

35 a second scanning element for scanning the light beam at a second predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, said second predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum second amplitude, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field in a plane defined by said first and second axes,

40 a third scanning element for scanning the light beam at a third predetermined amplitude along a third axis perpendicular to said plane, said third predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum third amplitude, said second scanning element scanning along the second axis at a selected frequency and said third scanning element being synchronized with said second scanning element to scan along the third axis at said selected frequency, and

45 a selector for determining said second predetermined amplitude and said third predetermined amplitude, said second and third predetermined amplitudes being related such that a sum of the percentage of said maximum second amplitude and the percentage of said maximum third amplitude is equal to one-hundred percent.

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2. The confocal microscope wherein said third axis comprises an optical pathway of the microscope, said third scanning element being mounted on an oscillating device configured to translate with an adjustable longitudinal displacement along the optical pathway. 5

3. The confocal microscope wherein said selector comprises a controller including a frequency source for selectively varying said second and third predetermined amplitudes. 10

4. The confocal microscope wherein said second scanning element and said third scanning element are driven by a common frequency source. 15

5. The confocal microscope wherein said second scanning element and said third scanning element are driven at a frequency of between about 1 and 100 Hz. 20

6. The confocal microscope further comprising a pivoting articulated arm housing the second scanning element. 25

7. The confocal microscope further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said imaging lens being configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from said second scanning element and focus the two-dimensional imaging field to a focal plane in the sample. 30

8. The confocal microscope wherein said third axis comprises an optical pathway of the microscope, said articulated arm further comprising a focussing lens positioned along the optical pathway between the second scanning element and the imaging lens, said focussing lens configured to make an entrance aperture of said imaging lens an optical conjugate to said second scanning element so that spatial displacements of the field are minimized at said aperture. 35

9. The confocal microscope wherein said second scanning element is positioned at a pivot point of said articulated arm. 40

10. The confocal microscope further comprising an aiming device for aiming said light beam as said light beam exits said scanning element. 45

11. The confocal microscope further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said imaging lens being configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from said second scanning element and focus the two-dimensional imaging field to a focal plane in the sample, wherein said aiming device is configured to position said second scanning element such that said light beam remains substantially centered on an entrance aperture of said imaging lens. 50

12. The confocal microscope wherein said arm further comprises a reflective elbow joint configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from the second scanning element. 55

13. The confocal microscope further including a light source for producing said light beam, said light source emitting light at a wavelength between about 1550 and 1800 nm.

14. An articulated arm for use with a confocal microscope including a scanning element for scanning a light beam along an axis, said articulated arm comprising:

a housing containing said scanning element mounted at a pivot point of said housing, and an aiming device for aiming said light beam as said light beam exits said scanning element.

15. The articulated arm further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said paging lens being configured to receive the light beam from said scanning element and focus the light beam to a focal plane in the sample, wherein said aiming device is configured to position said scanning element such that said light beam remains substantially centered on an entrance aperture of said imaging lens.

16. A confocal microscope for generating an image of living tissue, comprising:

an optical delivery system including a light source for producing a light beam, said light beam having a wavelength in the range of about 1550 to 1800 nm,

a first scanning element for scanning the light beam along a first axis, and

a second scanning element for scanning the light beam along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field along a plane defined by said first and second axes.

17. The confocal microscope configured to image tissue at a depth of about 0 to 3 mm.

18. A coupler for coupling a microscope objective lens to living tissue, comprising:

a template defining a tissue contacting surface for adhesive mounting to the tissue, said contacting surface defining a tissue imaging aper-

ture, and

a housing defining a chamber for receiving the objective lens, said housing including a first mount for rigidly coupling the objective lens to said housing, said housing further including a second mount for rigidly coupling said template to said housing.

19. A method for generating an image of a sample, comprising:

- a) illuminating said sample with a confocal microscope including an objective lens for focusing a light beam at the sample, and
- b) locating an index matching fluid having an index between about 1.39 and 1.41 between the objective lens and the sample.

20. A method for generating an image of a sample, comprising:

- a) illuminating said sample with a confocal microscope comprising

a first scanning element for scanning a light beam at a first predetermined amplitude along a first axis,

a second scanning element for scanning the light beam at a second predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, said second predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum second amplitude, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field in a plane defined by said first and second axes,

a third scanning element for scanning the light beam at a third predetermined amplitude along a third axis perpendicular to said plane, said third predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum third amplitude, said second scanning element scanning along the second axis at a selected frequency and said third scanning element being synchronized with said second scanning element to scan along the third axis at said selected frequency, and a selector for determining said second predetermined amplitude and said third predetermined amplitude, said second and third predetermined amplitudes being related such that a sum of the percentage of said maximum second amplitude and the percentage of said maximum third amplitude is equal to one-hundred percent,

- b) scanning said optical field through said sample, and

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c) receiving remitted light from said sample with a photodetector to form an image of the sample.

21. The method further including scanning said optical field through a sample including melanin as a naturally occurring contrasting agent.

Claims

1. A confocal microscope including an image plane rotation assembly, said image plane rotation assembly comprising:

a first scanning element for scanning a light beam at a first predetermined amplitude along a first axis,

a second scanning element for scanning the light beam at a second predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, said second predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum second amplitude, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field in a plane defined by said first and second axes,

a third scanning element for scanning the light beam at a third predetermined amplitude along a third axis perpendicular to said plane, said third predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum third amplitude, said second scanning element scanning along the second axis at a selected frequency and said third scanning element being synchronized with said second scanning element to scan along the third axis at said selected frequency, and

a selector for determining said second predetermined amplitude and said third predetermined amplitude, said second and third predetermined amplitudes being related such that a sum of the percentage of said maximum second amplitude and the percentage of said maximum third amplitude is equal to one-hundred percent.

45 2. The confocal microscope of claim 1 wherein said third axis comprises an optical pathway of the microscope, said third scanning element being mounted on an oscillating device configured to translate with an adjustable longitudinal displacement along the optical pathway.

3. The confocal microscope of claim 1 wherein said selector comprises a controller including a frequency source for selectively varying said second and third predetermined amplitudes.

4. The confocal microscope of claim 1 wherein said second scanning element and said third scanning

element are driven by a common frequency source.

5. The confocal microscope of claim 1 wherein said second scanning element and said third scanning element are driven at a frequency of between about 1 and 100 Hz,
 and/or preferably further comprising a pivoting articulated arm housing the second scanning element,
 and/or preferably further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said imaging lens being configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from said second scanning element and focus the two-dimensional imaging field to a focal plane in the sample,
 and/or wherein preferably said third axis comprises an optical pathway of the microscope, said articulated arm further comprising a focussing lens positioned along the optical pathway between the second scanning element and the imaging lens, said focussing lens configured to make an entrance aperture of said imaging lens an optical conjugate to said second scanning element so that spatial displacements of the field are minimized at said aperture,
 and/or wherein preferably said second scanning element is positioned at a pivot point of said articulated arm,
 and/or preferably further comprising an aiming device for aiming said light beam as said light beam exits said scanning element,
 and/or preferably further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said imaging lens being configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from said second scanning element and focus the two-dimensional imaging field to a focal plane in the sample, wherein said aiming device is configured to position said second scanning element such that said light beam remains substantially centered on an entrance aperture of said imaging lens,
 and/or wherein preferably said arm further comprises a reflective elbow joint configured to receive the two-dimensional imaging field from the second scanning element,
 and/or wherein preferably further including a light source for producing said light beam, said light source emitting light at a wavelength between about 1550 and 1800 nm.

6. An articulated arm for use with a confocal microscope including a scanning element for scanning a light beam along an axis, said articulated arm comprising:
 a housing containing said scanning element mounted at a pivot point of said housing, and an aiming device for aiming said light beam as

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said light beam exits said scanning element, and/or preferably further comprising an imaging lens housed within said arm, said imaging lens being configured to receive the light beam from said scanning element and focus the light beam to a focal plane in the sample, wherein said aiming device is configured to position said scanning element such that said light beam remains substantially centered on an entrance aperture of said imaging lens.

7. A confocal microscope for generating an image of living tissue, comprising:
 an optical delivery system including a light source for producing a light beam, said light beam having a wavelength in the range of about 1550 to 1800 nm,
 a first scanning element for scanning the light beam along a first axis, and
 a second scanning element for scanning the light beam along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field along a plane defined by said first and second axes,
 and/or preferably configured to image tissue at a depth of about 0 to 3 mm.

8. A coupler for coupling a microscope objective lens to living tissue, comprising
 a template defining a tissue contacting surface for adhesive mounting to the tissue, said contacting surface defining a tissue imaging aperture, and
 a housing defining a chamber for receiving the objective lens, said housing including a first mount for rigidly coupling the objective lens to said housing, said housing further including a second mount for rigidly coupling said template to said housing.

9. A method for generating an image of a sample, comprising:
 a) illuminating said sample with a confocal microscope including an objective lens for focusing a light beam at the sample, and
 b) locating an index matching fluid having an index between about 1.39 and 1.41 between the objective lens and the sample.

10. A method for generating an image of a sample, comprising:
 a) illuminating said sample with a confocal microscope comprising

a first scanning element for scanning a light beam at a first predetermined amplitude along a first axis,

a second scanning element for scanning the light beam at a second predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to said first axis, said second predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum second amplitude, thereby generating a two-dimensional imaging field in a plane defined by said first and second axes,

a third scanning element for scanning the light beam at a third predetermined amplitude along a third axis perpendicular to said plane, said third predetermined amplitude being a percentage of a maximum third amplitude, said second scanning element scanning along the second axis at a selected frequency and said third scanning element being synchronized with said second scanning element to scan along the third axis at said selected frequency, and a selector for determining said second predetermined amplitude and said third predetermined amplitude, said second and third predetermined amplitudes being related such that a sum of the percentage of said maximum second amplitude and the percentage of said maximum third amplitude is equal to one-hundred percent,

b) scanning said optical field through said sample, and

c) receiving remitted light from said sample with a photodetector to form an image of the sample,

and/or preferably further including scanning said optical field through a sample including melanin as a naturally occurring contrasting agent.

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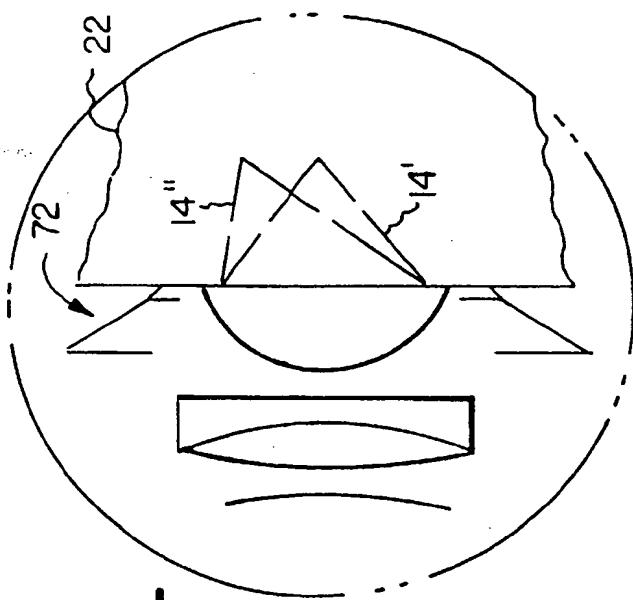
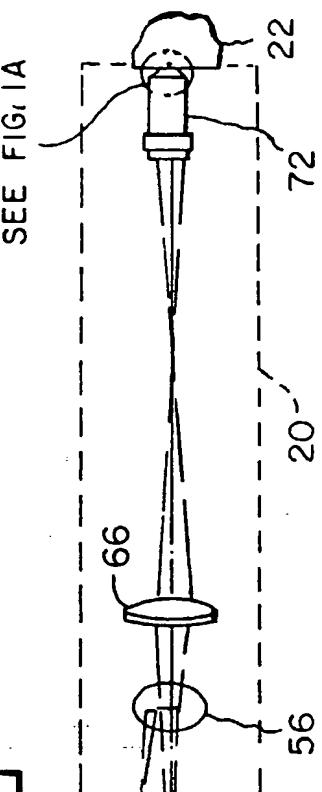
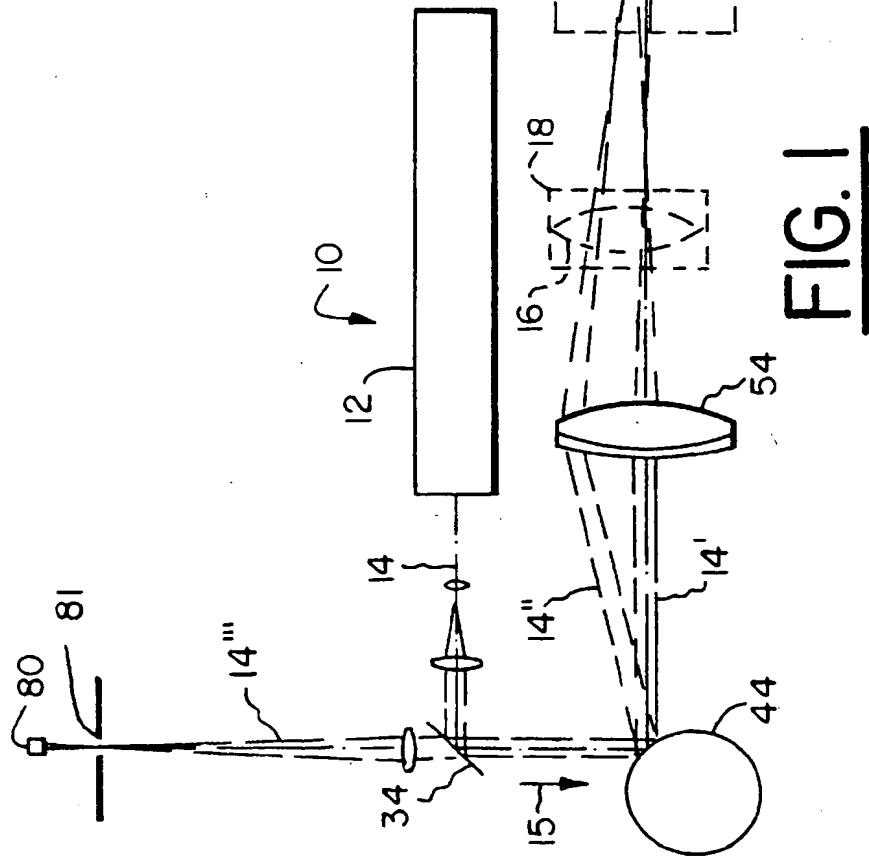
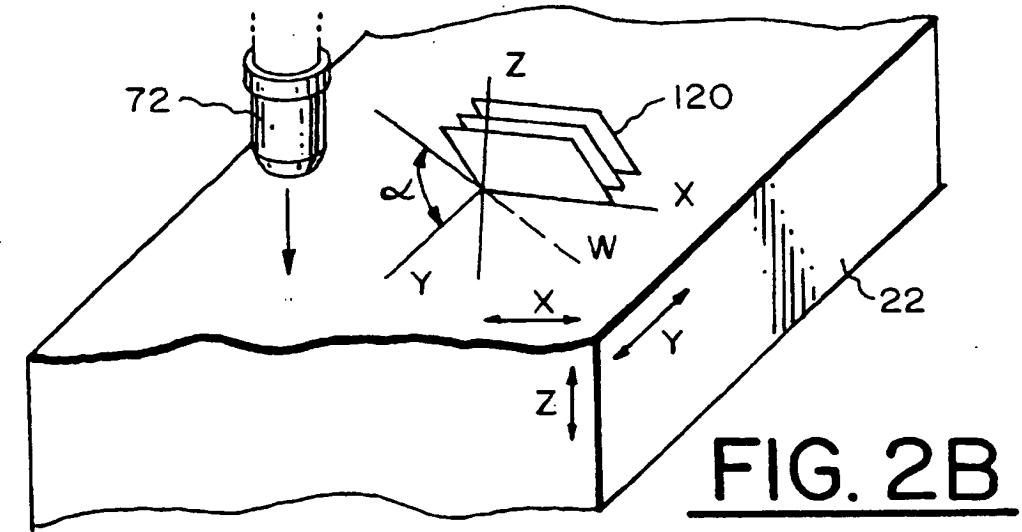
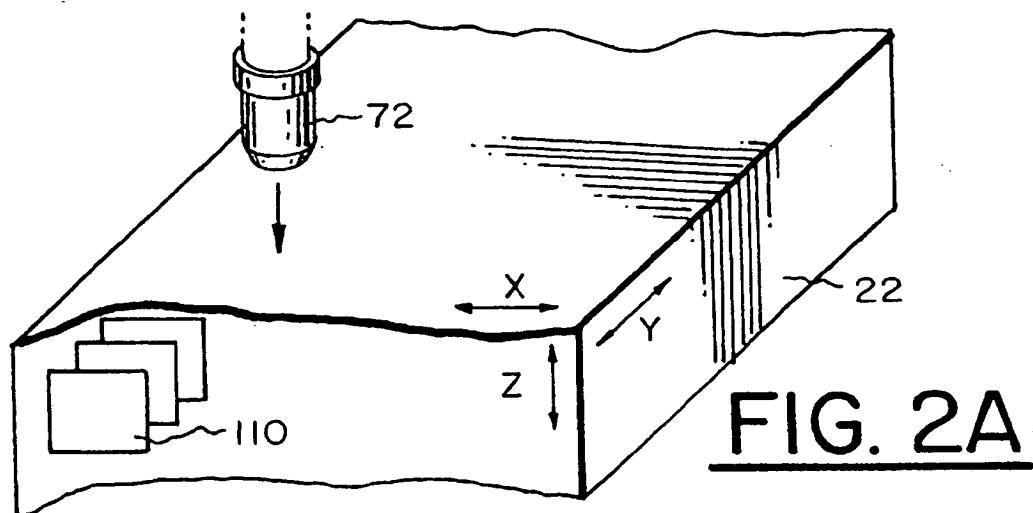
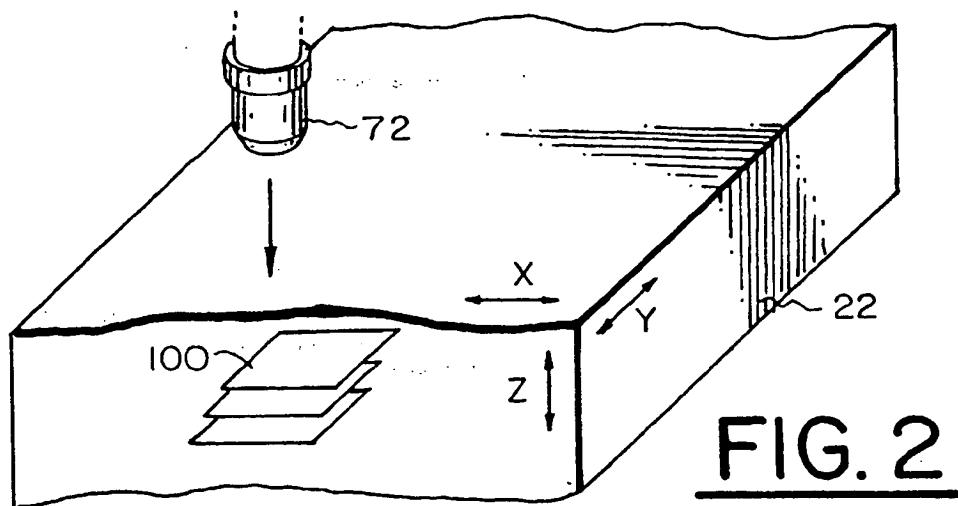


FIG. 1A



SEE FIG. 1A





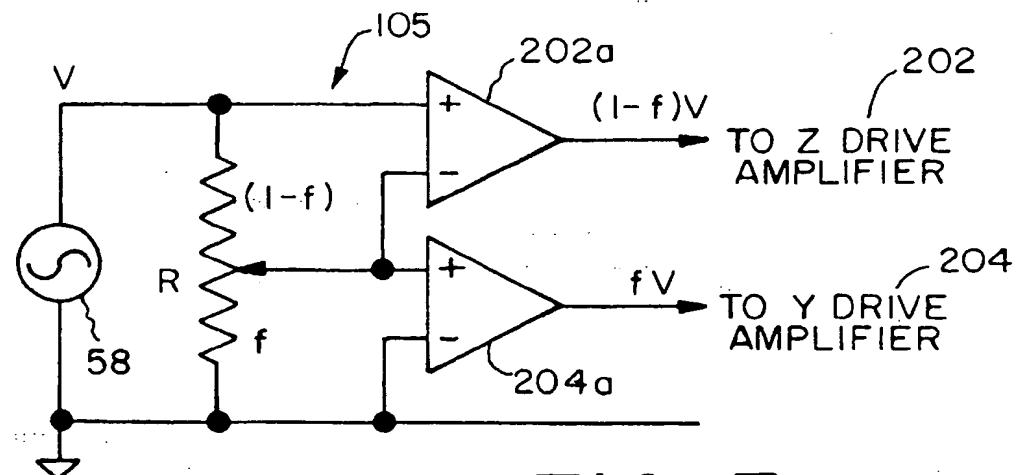
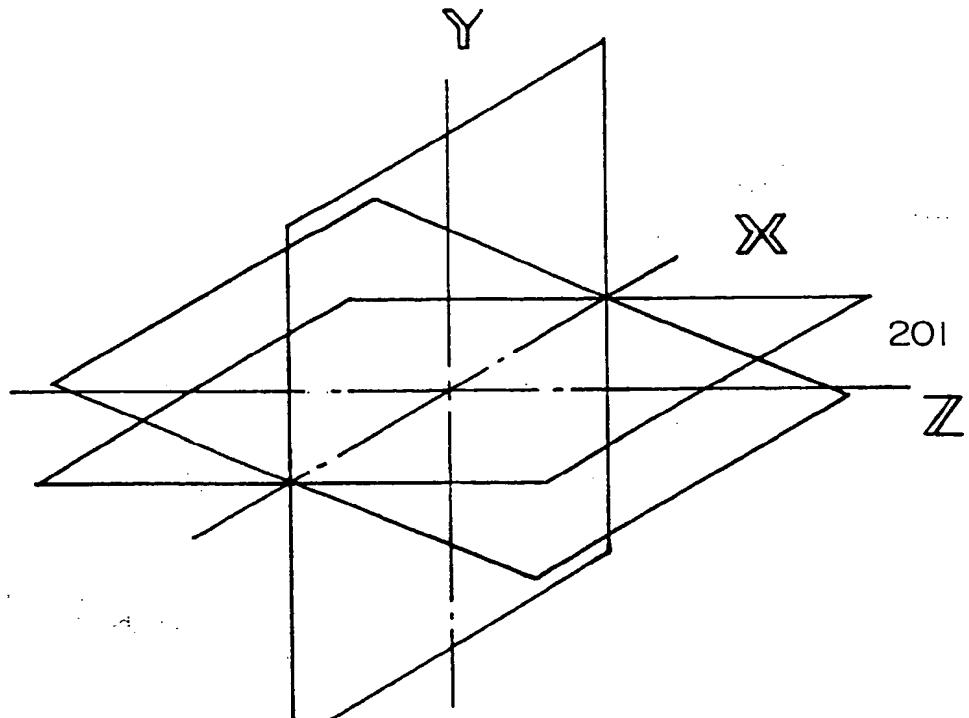
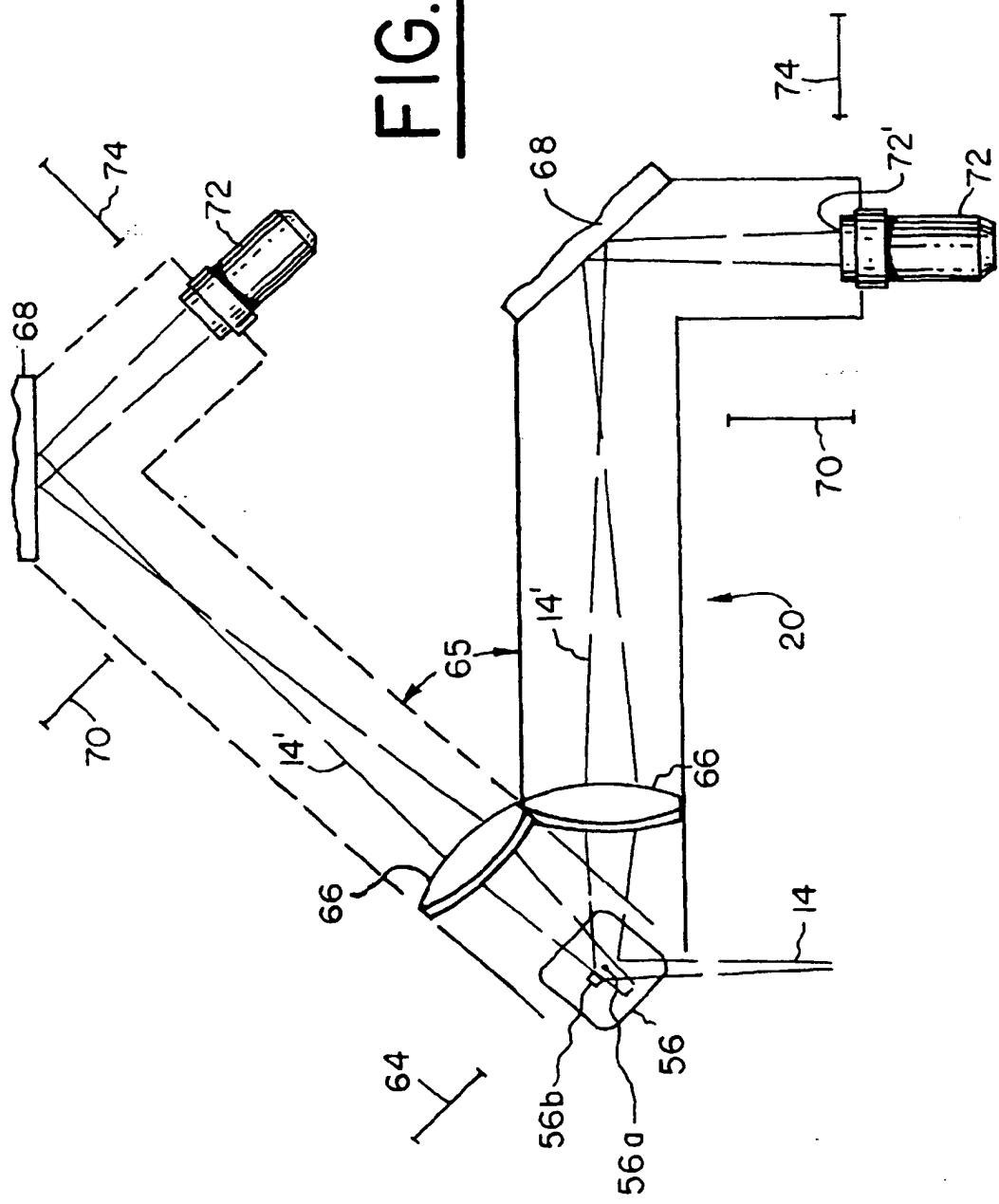
FIG. 3FIG. 4

FIG. 5



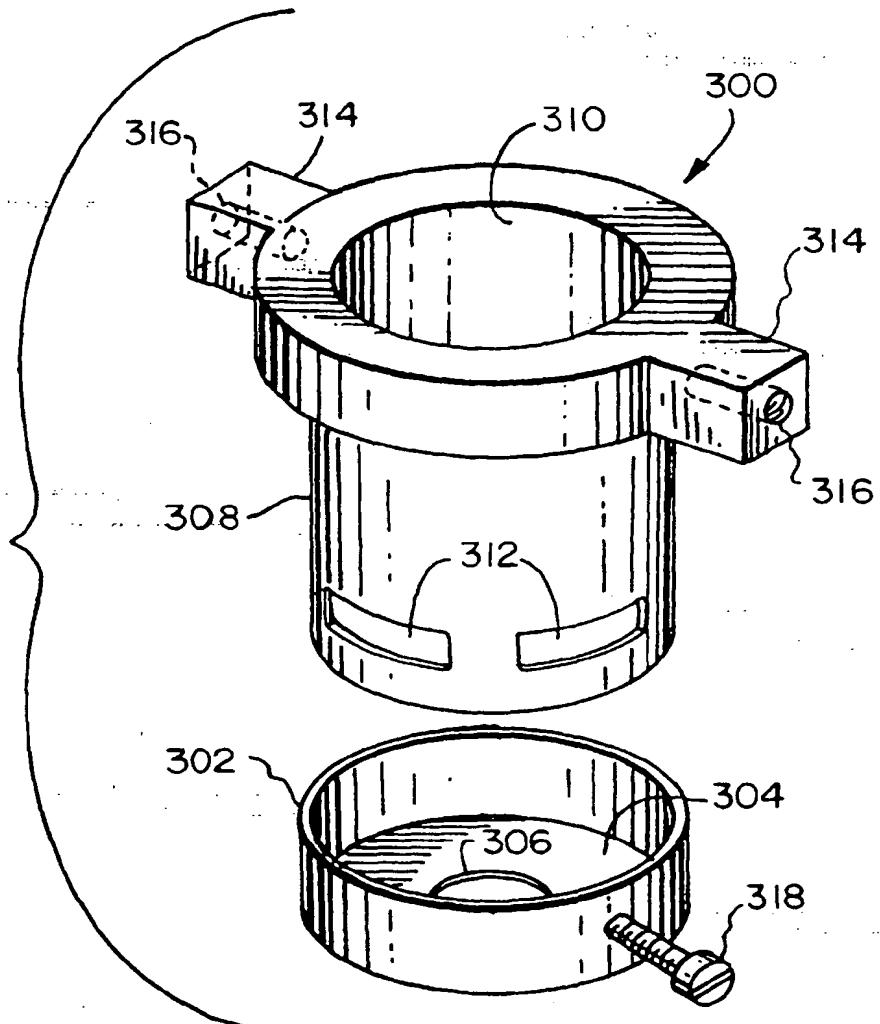


FIG. 6

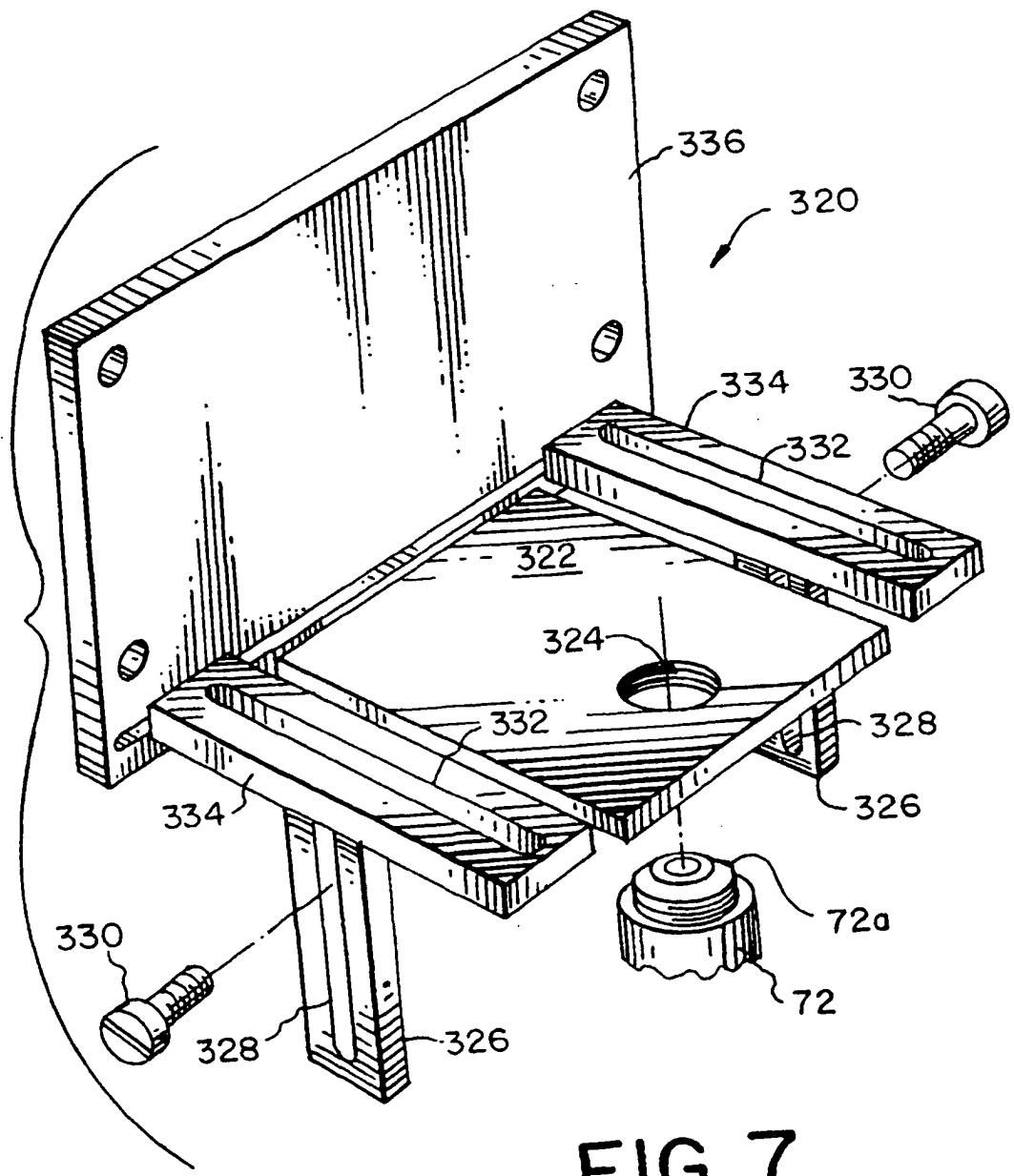


FIG. 7

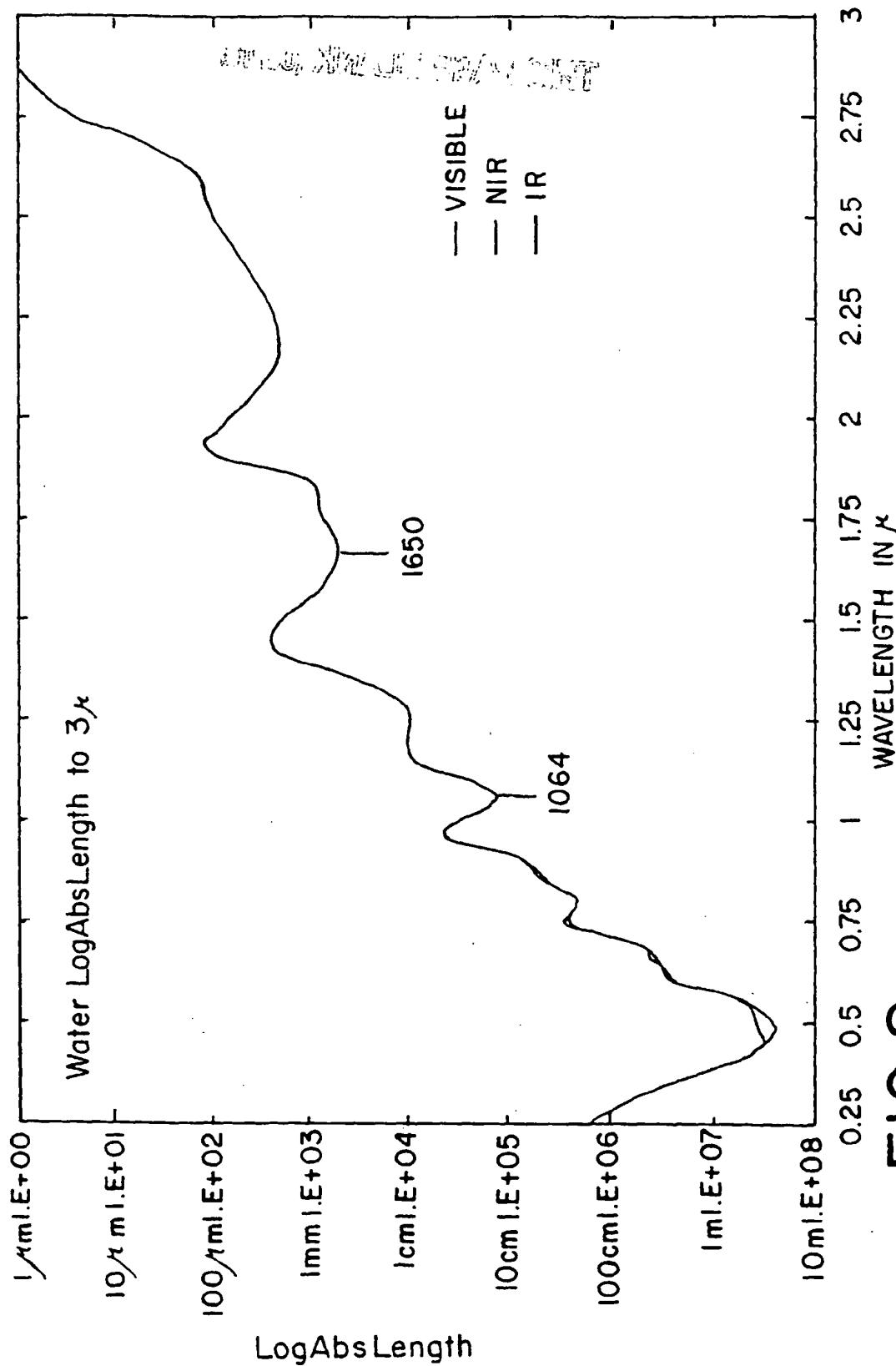


FIG. 8

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(54) Three-dimensional scanning confocal laser microscope

(57) A confocal microscope for generating an image of a sample includes a first scanning element (44) for scanning a light beam along a first axis (15), and a second scanning element (56) for scanning the light beam at a predetermined amplitude along a second axis perpendicular to the first axis (15). A third scanning element (18) scans the light beam at a predetermined amplitude along a third axis (15) perpendicular to an

imaging plane defined by the first and second axes. The second and third scanning element are synchronized to scan at the same frequency. The second and third predetermined amplitudes are percentages of their maximum amplitudes. A selector determines the second and third predetermined amplitudes such that the sum of the percentages is equal to one-hundred percent.

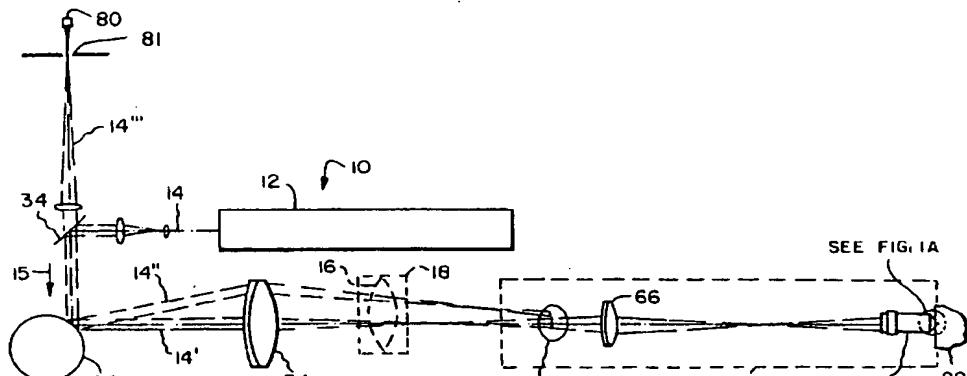


FIG. I

EP 0 821 256 A3



DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT									
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)						
X	FR 2 682 490 A (L'OREAL) 16 April 1993 * the whole document *	8	G02B21/00 G02B21/24						
X	US 4 208 101 A (CONRADI RUDOLF ET AL) 17 June 1980 * abstract; figure 1 * * column 3, line 38 - line 66 *	8							
X, P	WO 96 21938 A (GEN HOSPITAL CORP) 18 July 1996 * the whole document *	1-5,7,10							
A	"MULTI-DEPTH LINEAR SCAN CONFOCAL IMAGING SYSTEM" IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN, vol. 39, no. 1, 1 January 1996, page 147/148 XP000556354 * the whole document *	1,7,10							
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 017, no. 566 (P-1629), 14 October 1993 & JP 05 164969 A (OLYMPUS OPTICAL CO LTD). 29 June 1993. * abstract *	1,2,5,7, 10	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6) G02B						
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 096, no. 006, 28 June 1996 & JP 08 043040 A (OLYMPUS OPTICAL CO LTD), 16 February 1996. * abstract *	1,2,5,7, 10							
A	CANNON J ET AL: "ULTRAVIOLET LASERS EXPAND USES OF CONFOCAL MICROSCOPES" LASER FOCUS WORLD, vol. 29, no. 1, 1 January 1993, pages 99-100, 102 - 104, XP000344888 * the whole document *	1-3,5,7, 10 -/-							
<p>The present search report has been drawn up for all claims</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Place of search</td> <td>Date of completion of the search</td> <td>Examiner</td> </tr> <tr> <td>THE HAGUE</td> <td>18 March 1998</td> <td>Jakober, F</td> </tr> </table>			Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	THE HAGUE	18 March 1998	Jakober, F	CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner							
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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	
A	WO 90 00754 A (HARRIS, M. R.) 25 January 1990 * abstract; figure 2 * * page 2, line 17 - line 34 * * page 5, line 31 - page 6, line 13 * ---	1,7,10	
A	US 4 025 171 A (PECK THEODORE H) 24 May 1977 * abstract; figures 1,2 * * column 2, line 66 - column 3, line 21 * -----	8	
TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)			

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search		Examiner
THE HAGUE	18 March 1998		Jakober, F
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CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):

No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

SEE SHEET B
(in case of Lack of Unity)

All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.

Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
1-5,7,8,10

None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

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European Patent
Office

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B

Application Number
EP 97 11 1874

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-5,7,10

refers to a confocal microscope having scanning means for generating a 3D-image.

2. Claim : 6

refers to an articulated arm comprising a control of the beam centering during arm's movements.

3. Claim : 8

refers to a coupler permitting light coupling between the objective and a living tissue.

4. Claim : 9

refers to a method for generating an image, comprising sample illumination and index adaptation between the objective lens and the sample.

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